

**Diocèse de Basankusu**  
**Commission Diocésaine Pour le Ressources**  
**Naturelles (CDRN)**  
**BP 68 Basankusu**  
**République Démocratique du Congo (RDC)**



## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **LOCAL FORUM, BEFALE, BASANKUSU**

**DATE: 13 - 14 JANUARY 2010**

The first local forum for the project "Community forest management as a contribution to poverty reduction in the DRC" was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at the Nsong'ek'elese primary school in Befale. This project is being implemented by Forests Monitor, on behalf of the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The forum was organised by Forests Monitor and the Diocesan Commission on Natural Resources (CDRN) of the Diocese of Basankusu, which is responsible for the coordination of project activities in Equateur Province. It followed the community dialogues organised by CDRN in Baringa on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> January 2010 and in Befale Rural Area on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010. These community dialogues brought together some 100 people (50 at each site) from all sectors of society, to discuss the following issues:

1. the status of forests
2. customary land rights
3. artisanal forest exploitation
4. protected areas and community forests
5. community forests as a tool for local development in the DRC
6. community forest management institutions
7. sharing of profits from community forests

With a few exceptions, the results of the dialogues in Baringa and Befale were similar to those held in previous community dialogues in Bobambo and Bokeka. In terms of the status of forests and customary land rights, the local communities highlighted that they perceived their ancestral lands to be an ancestral heritage. They did not feel they should have to request them from the State. They want to continue to use them as they have done in the past and simply want the State and other partners to provide capacity building so that they could improve their cultivation, hunting and fishing techniques, and be trained in the use and preservation of non-timber forest products and in community conservation.

In line with the communities of Bokeka and Bobambo, the people of Baringa and Befale were in favour of natural resource conservation, although they still remembered the sad events when local people were expelled from the Lomako Reserve.



### **Objective**

This forum presented the findings of the community dialogues held in the Basankusu area between May and September 2009 and in Befale during January 2010, in order to validate and expand on these conclusions with input from other actors in the environment sector. A further objective was to make recommendations to decision makers so that the rights and concerns of local communities would be taken into account in the development and implementation of policies on community forest management.

### **Participants**

About 50 people from various institutions attended the local forum. They included representatives of the local public administration (A.T.A., CPEAT of Bauta, the environmental supervisor, agricultural inspector, sector chiefs of Befumbo, Duale and Lomako, the town chief of Befale, chief inspector of Pool secondary school and an ICCN representative), the private sector (focal point of Congo-Futur), civil society (CLGP, RRN, representatives of religious groups, farming associations, women's groups and peasant associations), representatives of local communities (customary chiefs, village chiefs from Bolumbuloko, Lolo, Lifumba, Esanga, Wamba-Linza, Loma, Boyela/Lisoko, Baringa and Boilinga) along with the Congolese Chamber of Commerce, the Alliance of the Presidential Majority, the UN, and local opinion leaders.

### **Summary of the Befale local forum**

The Befale local forum was structured around two main elements:

1. The validation of the findings from the community dialogues;
2. Further discussion of the seven themes listed above.

A presentation was first made on the findings of the community dialogues held at the two sub-sites of Bobambo, in Gombalo sector, and Bokeka, in Waka-Bokeka sector, as well as those held in Basankusu, Baringa and Befale.

The results of these dialogues were not only validated but also expanded on through group work focusing on five areas: identifying the local community and community forests, community conservation, artisanal forest exploitation, the size and demarcation of a local community forest and the role and place of women in community forests. The following recommendations were made for each of these five areas:

### **1. Identifying the local community and community forests**

- For the people of Befale, the local community is the village.
- The identifying criteria are that its members:
  - observe the same customs,
  - speak the same language,
  - are under the authority of the same chief,
  - are settled on the same land.
- The appropriate unit for managing a community forest is the village.
- The institution best able to represent the community in the process of obtaining and managing a community forest would be a representative association, recognised by the village and based within it.
- A community forest should be identified and demarcated according to customary, natural and administrative boundaries.
- Mediation mechanisms need to be put in place to deal with the many potential conflicts that could arise related to community forest management.

### **2. Community conservation**

- The population of Befale is in favour of community conservation, provided the State plays only a supportive role in this process.
- The population of Befale is opposed to illicit and unplanned exploitation, undertaken with the knowledge of the local authorities, and to the local population being "driven out".
- The population of Befale recommends the following, in order to build on the strengths of forest management and minimise the threats:
  - to gain an understanding of the land being used to support livelihoods and of the rules in place;
  - to manage species rationally;
  - to support the local population in conservation efforts.

### **3. Artisanal forest exploitation**

- Artisanal logging is widespread in the Befale area, where it provides an important source of income that enables local people to overcome socio-economic problems.
- 3 advantages of artisanal logging are:
  - paying for children's schooling;
  - poverty reduction;
  - improvement of the environment.
- 3 disadvantages of artisanal logging are:
  - forest degradation (with no reforestation);
  - failure to comply with the minimum exploitable diameters for timber species;
  - physical strain on the body.

### **4. The area and demarcation of a local community forest**

- The area of a community forest should be ascertained by participatory mapping.
- The factors to be taken into consideration when demarcating a community forest are the natural, customary and administrative boundaries, along with the lands already occupied.
- The roles to be played by other partners are:
  - the State as a supporting partner and arbiter of conflicts;

- neighbouring communities to respect the boundaries and property of others and work in synergy (a “good neighbours policy”).

**5. *The role and place of women in local community forest management***

- The role to be played by women in the process of obtaining and managing a community forest is the same as that of men, as they are all community members.
- Women need to be involved in the process of obtaining and managing community forests.
- Women’s representation on the decision-making bodies for community forests is necessary in order to respect equality.

Basankusu site coordinator

Befale, 15 January 2010